

**BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
RECORD OF DECISION
FOR
POTHOLES RESERVOIR RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN
Final Environmental Impact Statement
INT-FES 01-40**

I. Introduction

This document constitutes the Record of Decision (ROD) of the Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) Pacific Northwest Region, regarding the alternative selected to provide management guidance for the resources under Reclamation jurisdiction at Potholes Reservoir. The 36,200-acre Potholes Reservoir Resource Management Plan (RMP) study area defines the Reclamation lands and waters which are the subject of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS), filed with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on December 7, 2001 (FES-01-40). The EPA's notice of availability was published in the *Federal Register* on December 14, 2001. The FEIS was prepared pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality Regulations for implementing the procedural requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), Department of Interior policies, and Reclamation's NEPA handbook. The FEIS provides an analysis of the potential impacts to the natural resources and human environment related to management changes for Reclamation lands in and around Potholes Reservoir.

II. Reclamation's Decision

Reclamation's decision is to implement the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) and associated environmental commitments (mitigation measures) as described in the FEIS. Implementing this alternative will balance the management agencies' and public's long-term vision for Potholes Reservoir while recognizing the need to protect the natural and cultural environment and support the overall recreational interests of visitors.

III. The Alternatives Considered

The RMP alternatives evaluated in the FEIS were developed by the Reclamation study team using the input received from the Land Management Agency and Ad Hoc work groups, various state and federal agency representatives, and the public. Each alternative identified specific actions to be taken within specific management areas of Potholes Reservoir as well as actions that are applicable reservoir-wide. The alternatives and themes which emerged are described below.

Alternative A - No Action: This alternative includes the actions and developments likely to occur in the absence of adopting and implementing a RMP for Potholes Reservoir. Many of the actions and developments identified are either required under existing Reclamation or Federal

law, policy, or regulation; are needed to meet applicable state or local regulations; or are authorized by existing management plans and agency policies in effect at Potholes Reservoir. This alternative therefore represents the current and foreseeable management situation at Potholes Reservoir.

Similar to the three “action” alternatives described below (Alternatives B, C, and D), the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission (SPRC) and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) will continue to administer and manage the Potholes Reservoir area with oversight provided by the Ephrata Field Office of the Bureau of Reclamation. The Grant County Sheriff’s Office will also remain a management partner at the reservoir providing general law enforcement services and periodic patrols within the Grant County Off-Road Vehicle (ORV) Area.

No changes would have been made to motorized travel and ORV management within the RMP study area. The 433-acre “Red Zone” would have remained closed to motorized travel/ORV use year-round; the 1,459-acre “Yellow Zone” would have remained open to motorized travel/ORV use from July 1 to October 1; and the 1,895-acre “Green Zone” would have remained open to motor vehicle travel/ORV use year-round.

Existing roads, trails, and recreation facilities would have been maintained to support current levels of activity with limited improvements made only on an as-needed basis and as funding permits. Required improvements for safety, sanitation, and accessibility for persons with disabilities would have been undertaken as funding allows. Overall, future land use and resource management decisions would have continued on an ad-hoc basis in the absence of a cohesive and comprehensive RMP to guide agency decisions and activities over the 10 year planning period.

Alternative B - Preferred: Alternative B is the Reclamation’s preferred alternative. It balances the management agencies’ and public’s long-term vision for Potholes Reservoir, recognizing the need to protect the natural and cultural environment while supporting the overall recreational interests of visitors. By combining elements and features from Alternatives C and D and the modifications from agency and public review, Alternative B best satisfies the RMP goals and objectives.

A mix of developed recreation areas and “designated” dispersed camping areas will be provided to accommodate the demand for recreation facilities and sites, as well as directing public use to specific areas where environmental damage would be less severe. ORV use restrictions are proposed to improve wildlife habitat, wildlife populations, sand dune integrity, and vegetative cover. This will be accomplished by permanently restricting motor vehicle use in approximately 919 acres of the 1,459-acre “Yellow Zone” currently open seasonally from July 1 through October. The remaining 539 acres of the “Yellow Zone” would still be open seasonally while no changes would occur to the “Red” or “Green Zone”.

Alternative C - Preservation and Enhancement: This alternative emphasizes natural resource preservation and enhancement and is the environmentally preferred alternative. The number of developed recreation areas and facilities would have remained essentially unchanged as no new

developments would have been constructed except to meet minimum basic facility needs for sanitation, public safety, and accessibility for persons with disabilities. Compared to the other alternatives, more of the primitive road network would be closed to motorized travel leaving fewer dispersed recreation areas accessible by motor vehicle. Similar to the other “action” alternatives, land use activities would have been focused and managed within environmentally suitable areas to reduce resource impacts and disturbances.

Motor vehicle travel and ORV use would have been discontinued by permanently closing the “Yellow Zone” and a portion of the “Green Zone” located inside the RMP study area. The Grant County ORV Area would have encompassed approximately 1,227 acres of the “Green Zone” located outside the RMP study area boundary.

Alternative D - Recreation Development: With an emphasis on recreation development, this alternative includes the highest number of developed and primitive recreation facilities and sites. Consistent with this management emphasis, ORV opportunities would have been expanded by allowing ORV use along several designated trails leading to the western shore of Moses Lake. The Grant County ORV Area would have encompassed approximately 1,895 acres designated as “Green Zone” (open year-round) inside and outside the RMP study area and 1,459 acres “open seasonally” within the existing “Yellow Zone” and inside the RMP study area. The ORV park size would have remained the same as the “No Action” Alternative and greater access opportunities would have been a specific element of Alternative D. Similar to the other “action” alternatives, land use activities would have been generally focused and managed within environmentally suitable areas to reduce resource impacts and disturbances.

Alternatives Considered but Not Carried Forward: As the alternatives were developed and refined, a number of individual plan elements and features were dropped from further consideration. One such element would have maximized the animal-unit-month (AUM) grazing allocation in North Potholes Reserve. This action was eliminated due to problems with the present grazing regime as well as higher livestock utilization and AUM allocations in a legislatively established State Game Reserve. The reserve is used by a large variety of game and nongame wildlife year-round and is managed for waterfowl production.

Another element eliminated from detailed study involved the establishment of idle speed and no-wake zones on the main reservoir for the purpose of improving boating, shoreline habitat and public safety. This element was eliminated due to recent amendments to Grant County Ordinance 6.08 - “An Ordinance Providing for the Safety of Boaters, Swimmers, and Others Using the Waters of Grant County and Providing Certain Regulations and Restrictions on the Use of Such Waters.”

IV. Decision Factors

Alternative B-Preferred is the alternative that best balances the needs and expectations at Potholes Reservoir by providing for future recreation development; controlling access and dispersed camping; reducing the acres of seasonal ORV use, and providing preservation and enhancement of natural and cultural resources. Implementation of Alternative B would facilitate

greater coordination among the many agency programs, plans, and actions as they apply to Reclamation lands in the RMP study area. The plan elements that balance the social and environmental elements of Potholes Reservoir in this alternative are:

Natural Resources

- Alternative B includes additional actions to minimize and correct soil and shoreline erosion problems; restore and protect vegetation, habitat diversity, wildlife, and water quality; and enhance visual quality.
- The water quality oversight panel will review the need for an expanded reservoir water quality and sediment sampling program to determine concentrations of potential contaminants of concern (dieldrin, methoxychlor, etc.) and the effects of mosquito control spraying activities and chemicals on reservoir water quality and biota.
- Develop criteria for the appearance of structures and natural landscape preservation. These criteria would be applied in the planning, design, land use agreements and construction of all new facilities and structures and in the maintenance or modification of all existing facilities and structures.

Cultural Resources

- Work with Native Americans who have interests at Potholes Reservoir to develop and display appropriate interpretive information related to their use of the area and the need to preserve and protect cultural resources.
- If cultural resources found eligible for the National Register are identified on Reclamation lands designated as “open” to ORV use, the Grant County ORV Area boundary would be adjusted to protect identified cultural resources and/or sites.

Recreation

- Alternative B provides for limited recreation development and the maintenance of existing recreation facilities and opportunities to a standard that protects the public and public investment while achieving resource preservation objectives. Future developed recreation areas would be limited to Potholes State Park and O’Sullivan Site - North where a higher level of site and facility development would be provided by the SPRC.
- Dispersed camping would continue to typify public recreation on lands administered by the WDFW.

Land Use and Administration

- **The land use agreement between the WDFW and Grant County to operate and maintain an ORV Area will be modified to include only those Reclamation lands within the Eastern Dunes management area, the southern portion of the Lower Crab Creek Arm and the south half of T18N, R28E, S10.**

Off-Road Vehicle Management

- Limit ORV use within the RMP study area to the Eastern Dunes and the southern portion of the Lower Crab Creek Arm management areas.
- Modify the Grant County ORV Area boundary to include the Eastern Dunes management area, the southern portion of the Lower Crab Creek Arm, 320 acres of Reclamation land outside the RMP study area (T18N, R28E, S10, S1/2), and Grant County ORV Area lands. The “Green Zone” open year-round to ORV use would continue to encompass approximately 1,895 acres.

Grazing Management

- Adjust livestock grazing management as needed to maintain or enhance habitat for identified special status plant and animal species. This may include development of livestock enclosures or restricted use to pastures where grazing systems cannot otherwise be adjusted to accommodate the habitat requirements of a special status species.
- Modify AUM allocations, season-of-use authorizations, and other Grazing Plan stipulations included in renewed permits in order to maintain or improve native rangeland species and attain composition, density, foliar cover, and vigor appropriate to site potential and wildlife management objectives.

Visitor Information and Interpretation

- Provide managed access, turnouts, signs, and/or interpretive trails and displays to enhance “Watchable Wildlife” viewing opportunities.

West Lake/North Outlet: Develop a half-mile loop trail beginning at the North Outlet parking lot. The trail will traverse through shrub-steppe, wetland, and riparian habitats. Wetland crossings will likely involve boardwalk construction.

North Potholes Reserve: Design and develop a system of hiking trails and blinds north of Job Corps Dike to view and interpret the area’s colonial nesting bird rookery for great blue herons, black-crowned night herons, great egrets, and double-crested cormorants. The project will also provide excellent opportunities to view shorebirds, Raptores, waterfowl, songbirds, terns, beaver and mule deer.

Public Health and Safety/Environmental Protection

- Under the preferred Alternative B, approximately 18.4 miles of primitive road will be permanently closed to motorized travel.
- Construct trails and boardwalks to control public access and foot traffic through wetland and riparian habitats in high use recreation areas (i.e., within the Developed Corridor).
- Control dispersed camping in environmentally unsuitable or sensitive areas through appropriate access restrictions, seasonal use restrictions, or closure. Manage this use according to the “Recreation” actions described above.

- On the basis of the information gathered, the management agencies will amend or rescind existing management strategies or actions to balance public recreation and resource protection policies, goals and objectives. Opportunities for public review and comment will be provided prior to adopting and implementing future management changes affecting public use.

V. Public Response to the FEIS

The *Federal Register* Notice of Availability of the FEIS was published on December 12, 2001. Copies of the FEIS were distributed to those who had commented on the draft EIS or had returned a form (sent to the entire mailing list) requesting a copy. No additional comments were received.

VI. Environmental Commitments in Implementing the Decision

In addition to the management actions described for the preferred alternative, the following mitigation actions are considered to be commitments made by Reclamation.

Air

- Reclamation will require air quality control measures in construction specifications for any proposed development actions under each alternative.

Soils

- Decreased erosion during construction will be addressed through: planting grasses, forbs, trees and shrubs or placement of rip-rap, sand bags, jute, sod, erosion mats, bale dikes, mulch, or excelsior blankets.
- Clearing schedules will be arranged to minimize the practical exposure of soils.
- Final erosion control and site restoration measures will be initiated as soon as an area is no longer needed for construction, stockpiling, or access.
- Short-term effects such as increased land or shoreline erosion in or near recreation sites will be minimized by adhering to Best Management Practices (BMPs) during construction.

Water Quality

- Expand the reservoir water quality and sediment sampling program. Review the need for routine testing of fish flesh for concentrations of pesticides and heavy metals contamination, and minimize chemical mosquito control methods.

Vegetation

- The use of native species or non-invasive species is recommended for re-vegetation efforts to maximize the potential to restore re-vegetated areas to high quality habitat.
- Construction specifications will require contractors to preserve the natural landscape and prevent any unnecessary destruction, scarring, or defacing of the natural surroundings in the work vicinity.
- Critical environmental areas (i.e., stream corridors, wetlands, riparian areas, Ute

ladies'-tresses orchid and gray cryptantha habitat, and steep slopes) will not be used for construction equipment or material storage or stockpiling; construction staging or maintenance; or temporary access roads.

- Upon the completion of construction, any land disturbed but not permanently occupied by new facilities will be graded to provide proper drainage and blend with the natural contours of the land, covered with topsoil stripped from construction areas, and re-vegetated with plants native to the area and beneficial to wildlife.
- The final recommended composition of plant species, seeding rates, and planting dates will be determined in consultation with the WDFW and USFWS (where applicable or appropriate).
- Uplands will be re-vegetated to the native vegetative community appropriate for the site's soil type, topographic position, and elevation.

Wildlife

- Efforts will be made to restore native plant "communities".
- More aggressive weed control plans, above and beyond simple noxious weed control measures, will benefit native plant communities.
- The development of new campgrounds, boat launches, interpretive trails, etc. will take place in areas which minimize adverse impacts to fish and wildlife.
- Special signage, seasonal road closures, firearms or shooting restrictions, and some vegetation management are measures to improve conditions for Washington ground squirrels near Lind Coulee.
- Bald eagle roosts and regular perch sites should be protected with access restrictions.
- Interpretive information should be developed to educate the public on the valuable and unique habitats and associated unique species present and measures being employed to protect them.

Fish

- Prior to any construction or bank stabilization projects, site-specific erosion and sediment control measures will be identified and incorporated into the project's construction specifications, reducing sediment delivery to the reservoir.
- Construction sites will be re-vegetated and riparian areas near shorelines will be planted with trees and shrubs to provide shade and habitat for fish and near-shore wildlife.
- Projects built below the reservoir high water line will be timed for construction to occur when the reservoir pool is at its lowest elevation to avoid damage to fish spawning and rearing habitat caused by the release of sediment into the reservoir or increased turbidity.
- Short-term effects such as increased shoreline erosion in or near construction sites will be minimized by adhering to Best Management Practices (BMPs) during project construction.
- During final layout and site design, measures to minimize asphalt surface runoff and the potential for pollutants (e.g., oil) entering the reservoir will also be identified and incorporated into the design.
- Herbicides used for the control of Eurasian water milfoil and purple loosestrife will

be selected for their low toxicity to aquatic wildlife and fish.

Threatened and Endangered Species

- In consultation with the USFWS, mitigation measures will be developed to minimize adverse impacts where appropriate, to special status species and habitats regardless of the alternative selected.

Cultural

- All identified cultural resources are recorded and mapped to professional standards.
- Whenever possible, cultural resources will be avoided during project implementation.
- Conduct Class III surveys and prepare a Cultural Resource Management Plan (CRMP).
- Coordinate with Native Americans who have interests at Potholes Reservoir to prepare the CRMP and manage cultural resources.

Monitoring

Mitigation actions for some adverse impacts include restoration of native vegetation in various portions of the RMP study area. These restoration efforts will be tied to monitoring and success criteria. That is, if initial restoration actions fall short of goals, additional actions will be necessary. Monitoring plans will be incorporated into each mitigation measure to look at effectiveness of the measure and identify adaptive management that is needed.

VII. Decision

Based on the factors discussed above, it is my decision that Reclamation shall proceed with implementing the Preferred Alternative (Alternative B) as described in the FEIS and this ROD. This alternative best achieves the project goals and objectives and meets the purpose and need of the project in an environmentally sensitive manner. Reclamation will implement the environmental commitments listed in this ROD which will either avoid or minimize adverse impacts associated with the Preferred Alternative.

Approved:

J. William McDonald
Regional Director
Pacific Northwest Region

Date

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